



Managerial Accounting and Society: Emerging Factors for ‘Decision Making’ of Accountants in the Modern Era

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Received: Nov 26, 2016;

Accepted: Mar 31, 2017;

Published: June 23, 2017

Source of Support: Nil

No Conflict of Interest: Declared

ABSTRACT

The managerial accounting offers a universal set of tools to manage the administration and acts as patterned entities for producing a return for the organization. In doing so, the chief problem faced by a professional and academic discipline like accounting is that it has to deal with two distinct planes: one is the theoretical stage, and the other is on the practical height. Since the influence of accounting affects areas beyond mere corporate and business entities to the day-to-day social role of accounting, the discipline must pay proper discretion in addressing both the aspects. This paper address three complicates issues that the modern day accounting is facing. First, it attempts to shed lights on the sociological concepts applicable in accounting to comprehend the implicative insinuations. Second, the civil discourse and the decision-making edifice of the management have taken under consideration. Third, it intends an approach to reconstruct the behavioral accounting.

Keywords: Managerial Accounting and Society, Polyphonic debate, Behavioral Implications, Public Discourse and Decision-Making, Social Accounting

INTRODUCTION

Managerial accounting in the recent past has assuredly appeared to be offering a universal set of tools being utilized to manage an organization as an enterprise, and also to act upon individuals and other units as uniform entities for producing a return. However, it often does not pay proper attention to any social perspectives, hence becomes unable to have an insight into the continuance and development of managerial accounting practices that carry social implications. The chief problem faced by a professional and academic discipline like accounting is that it has to exist on two different levels: one is the theoretical stage, and the other is on the practical height. Behavioral accounting is overly rational and pursues the natural scientific methods which are unsuited to the issues of collective behavior. It needs the understanding that the influence of accounting affects areas beyond ordinary corporate and business entities to the collective day-to-day social role. Hence, there has been questioning the ability of contemporary accounting education to prepare the learners adequately for full participation in the economy without failing to show equal interest in the society (Ravenscroft & Williams, 2004). These challenges the idea of accounting being a neutral technical discipline that and give the birth of the need of accounting that can be abstracted from its social context. In addition to

that, accounting is recognized to be equally a specialized discipline just as it is an ethical discourse (Waddock, 2005). Therefore, it is often argued that the ‘Social accounting’ needs to be accounting which involves the communication of information on the impact of an entity and its activities on the society (Estes, 1976). In this regard, the first responsibility would be to consolidate the sociological concepts in accounting to comprehend the implicative insinuations. Second, the civil discourse and the decision-making edifice of the management require consideration. Determinately, an approach to reconstruct the behavioral accounting needs to be intended. To do that, a congruous analysis of the development of Accounting in the historical content is required. Significant improvements can be made at the moment accountants open communications with the scholars from other disciplines in the field of accounting. This paper makes an effort to discuss, how accounting can generate social values and new insights into all the problems associated with it.

DISCUSSION

Managerial accountants often face challenges of being not felicitous to plead the social forces while describing the facts of the figure. Indubitably, Accounting has an exceedingly convivial implication that has thought before. Nonetheless, the formal understanding of its social



explanation is yet to develop. More often than not, the systematic approach of empirical inquiry in behavioral accounting is infrequent, so does the construction of theory is dubious. Hence, addressing concerns as such have already hit up some arguments, commonly known as 'polyphonic debate' (Ahrens, et al., 2006). Undeniably, reliable accounting skills have a valuable role to play in overcoming visibility problems in its core functions. This includes informing the concerned community clearly about the use of its resources, the burdens and the benefits it has been obliged to bear in major development decisions. Social accounting might be operationalized to help make existing pluralistic structures operative or even to promote phenomenal democratic change in this professional field. There are at least two non-calculative possibilities for accounting in social areas: first, using accounting metaphors as a conceptual tool; and second, using accounting narratives. Metaphors must not be merely incorporated from conventional accounting; they must also be adapted to make the accounting craft relevant to societal accountability. The use of narratives can create different visibilities and open areas for debate. Any form of social assessment or decision-making must cover across all disciplines and not just one area since accounting represents one of man's most concerted efforts to avoid chaos and it would be informative to view it as a social construction and to see how it functions in the everyday world. Therefore, the format of the transformation of the discipline has to be outlined.

Numerous accounting researchers and distinctive accounting professionals have identified trends in the evolution of the accounting profession. They indicated that the discipline has been transformed from a natural scientific process to a profession that incorporates the collective welfare in its line of work. Traditional scholars in the field of accounting have disagreed on issues concerning facticity in history, the objectivity of the facts and the significance of primary source material. Some traditionalists concede that the selection of the piece of information to report from the archive, in general, is very subjective. On the objectivity issue, others argue that facts show mere perception; hence they should be viewed as representatives of the reality (Funnel, 1996). Traditionalists are usually more optimistic about the value of primary source material, and so they emphasize a lot that major sources are the medium through which the past is a testament to the present. Therefore, the primary problem is traditional curricula contain a vocational focus that denies the importance of seeking a balance between the humanistic, professional and formative elements of accounting studies (Craig, Clarke & Amernic, 1999). Traditional accounting educational programs remain very deficient of the ideals of education developing the person as a whole and seldom preparing the accountants for a full and meaningful participation in the socioeconomic life. While calls for a reform in accounting education to deal with the challenges of business ethics continue, research

shows that similar calls in the past have not been embraced practically (Albrecht & Sack, 2000).

Addressing issues of behavioral managerial accounting mentioned above, have hit up some arguments known as 'polyphonic debate'; nonetheless, it fails to be informative in the interpretive accounting research. Ahrens and Chapman (2006) indicate interpretive research has a great deal contributing to our understanding of the methods applicable in accounting. However, despite these efforts, even after three decades of critical accounting research, the literature is scant to explain how accountants go about the production of accountings and in this case, how they incorporate their activities with those of the societies around them. To deal with the consequences of the traditional behavioral assumptions, one needs to answer two crucial questions. First, out of the models which one comes closest to reflecting the traditional behavioral perception of the majority of the management accountant? The second question is, out of all the models which one is closest to explaining human instigation and behavior as in the case of addressing real life scenario. Roslender and Dillard (2003) suggest that philosophy of management accounting is majorly based on the traditional structure. For the second question, there is a lot of model of literature in sociology and organization based theory to give weight the notion that the behavioral model is much realistic as compared to the traditional perception. Hence a third question is raised: what if managerial accounting theory was measured on the traditional perception of behavior and if for a fact the perception of behavioral is enough reflection of the world, then what impact can be foreseen to come from this conflict? It's evident that managerial accounting as it is now is expected to add to an entire range of unwanted results from organization members.

Accounting systems have made people decide on the results which may very often do not take into consideration of the best interest and welfare of the members of the organization. For instance, systems in budgeting are used mainly to exact pressure on the workers to hit a target. With this kind of pressure, the result is easy to predict; all efforts are given to the budget to give rise to a much larger slack as possible. Second, more work is channeled to actualize performance in line with the budget. Managers will make every possible effort with all means conceivable to better their performance to go together with the budget. The unusual thing is the same managers will give the same amount of time to appear less effective when the actual performance shows more optimism on their budget even if it means generating the unnecessary cost of assuming possible profit. Another common area where management accounting systems are deemed to contribute to undesired behaviors is in the evaluation of performance. A good example is at this level that the return on investment serves as an index of performance. This index provides a comparison between a compliment of a unit and the value of resource committed to it. To improve such a performance index manager may

decrease spending on critical aspects like customer relations which can have a long-term adverse effect on the organization (Aerts, 1994). Therefore, the modern view of behavior suggests that the traditional view does not show a valid framework for a behaviorally sound management accounting system to operate. It would be a recognizable step forward if all accountants gained a significant understanding of behavioral science to at least recognize that there are problems in their field of work.

It is important to bear in mind that the accountant's way of viewing the organization has a tactical effect on the future accounting research. The science of accounting is less interested in describing the activities of an organization with other disciplinary vocabularies. The problem is not based on arranging in a line of accounting with organization theory; it's based on specific a type of organization concept that it selects to adopt. As per now, accounting researchers are pursuing an angle of organization, which seems to treat organizations and entities and leaving out the part played by the organization process (Aerts, 1994). It's debated that when an accounting professional observes an organization, most of the time he or she is in awe of its advance, instead of making the scene he faces simpler; hence the observer tends to lean more on the tangible aspect of the organization than the intangible facets in it. Public Discourse of Accounting as a separate discussion is also needed under consideration. Major development decisions impact on both the social environment and the economy. In the aims of achieving economic progress and growth, social impacts tend to be ignored and discounted merely because most of the social science aspects are intangible. These lead the social factors into the neglected depths in public discourse and decision making (Walker, 1989). In this process, the role of accountants becomes very meaningful since accounting is a shared technology, a form of social power that is well incorporated into the public decision-making processes. Accountants have been observed to ignore costs not associated with fiscal variables just because they are not directly quantifiable in monetary terms.

Roslender and Dillard (2003) argue that it makes no sense to learn the behavioral impact of accounting in isolation. There has been a rising trend in accounting research to notice the role that is done by the organizational context that gives rise to the accounting functions. An accounting process does not happen in a vacuum, but they are linked to several organization processes, denotes a very important turning point in behavioral accounting research area. Accounting is both a managerial and organizational product, and it also influences product that portrays reality. Paolo Quattrone and Trevor Hopper (2001) while arguing about the implications for research in accounting and control stated that "whether inspired by a theory of rational choices or by the search for contextual factors explaining change, is trapped in a problematical modernist constitution that grants the object of change and observers a definite ontology and methodology". They also indicate

that "even attempts that highlight the plurality of inputs and outputs of accounting change are trapped within a modernist dichotomy which defines boundaries such as in versus out, external versus the internal, organization versus context. Further, they continues, "attempts to overcome this issue have viewed the change as a process drawing on the notion of the institution but epistemologically it is sometimes difficult to reconcile this with the idea of change as a process." They observed that accounting had been studied as a practice that creates centers of calculation. It thus drives change only in maintaining the organizational stability. Instead of focusing on how accounting makes the organization stable, we should re-conceptualize accounting by changing how we view it as productions of organizational knowledge and instead interpret it as the context of evolutionary fabrications of knowledge of organizations (Quattrone and Hopper, 2001).

Accountants have become increasingly proficient in using powerful technicalities, and it is very unfortunate because accounting techniques can sometimes cause poor and unnecessary behavioral responses for the organization. Several explanations have been addressed in explaining the failure of practicing management accountants to be more considerate with the behavioral implications of accounting. The leading explanation bases its argument on the fact that change takes time and the introduction of the idea of behavioral accounting into the training of accountants will have a long and very slow process. It may actually be very necessary to slowly develop a new generation of accounting instructors who are concerned about behavioral matters. Unfortunately, it appears that the managerial accountants were already practicing in the field participate in continuing learning programs with a goal of improving knowledge of technical procedures and almost zero interest is expressed in courses dealing with behavioral topics (Roslender & Dillard, 2003). The second crucial fact is that very little of the literature of behavioral accounting gives any workable guides to action. That raises the lack of interest seen in accountants in the behavioral aspects of accounting. It becomes highly difficult for the people practicing accounting to find anything immediately useful for their daily mechanical routine of activities. Notwithstanding, the impossibility of developing a thorough behaviorally strong management accounting system should not justify the apparent apathy shown in these matters. Improvements can always be made if only accountants were aware of the behavioral problems in their line of work and reflected this awareness in their organizational relationships (Bush & Maltby, 2004). The third reason lies in a problem within the management accountants. If management fails to show any signs of concerns to the contemporary views of the management process, it is very unlikely that the concerned accountants will see the need to worry about such matters. In the absence of changes in the management ideologies, accountants who try to change their systems by

incorporating contemporary behavioral theories in their activities may face resistance and intense resentment from the reluctance of the top level administration.

Accounting continues being viewed as a process of representing a numerical financial reality. This narrows accounting to just one procedural action that involves calculations, leaving out a very critical area of communication and social responsibility. Accounting has potential that is yet to be realized. It can become a pronounced human practice that might involve evocative of the world that is to be accounted for (Arrington and Francis, 1993). However, the objectivity of accounting is just but a mere illusion. The social accounting must, therefore, stand on values that are not objective. Such accounting is very crucial in decision making which relies on discussions and debates. Accounting statements should be considered to have been a form of communication and should be designed to achieve innovative possibilities for open debate and discourse. The task of social accountants should be one of providing relevant information and not just produce rigid technical statements that do not allow an exterior view or insight to be incorporated (Bush & Maltby, 2004). It is a great paradox that value is the most used term in accounting and less than a quarter of the total accounting professionals knows just how many productive arrangements of meaningful concepts it provides in other disciplines (Tinker 1985). Choices of values are moral ones that will basically influence the picture drawn by accounting. Birkin (1996) says that the critical issue in the environmental arena "... is not one of technique, but one of the values".

Social responsibility is an imperative issue in the current accounting environment. Accountants play a very decisive role in today's society in areas related to corporate social responsibility like transparency, ethics, reporting, legal compliance, resource consumption as well as communication with stakeholders. Also, one of the most obvious interpretations of accountability in the public sector is financial accountability (Corbett, 1992). With the current global environmental concern, a broader conception of accountability should include environmental concerns as well as social and community issues. Social accounting could involve the measurement of costs and benefits, but it could also include accounting for social impacts which are not quantifiable at all. It becomes really difficult to define exactly what constitutes the alternative of the natural scientific approach to accounting. 'Social Accounting' has been termed to be the expansion of the existing boundaries of the accounting beyond the normal fiscal consequences (Salivary, 2003). When a firm becomes socially responsible, it fulfills its social obligations and informs its members together with the general public to enable everyone to form a correct opinion. Social accounting encounters the unfavorable publicity and criticism that are leveled by hostile media outlets. It has also been seen to assist management in creating appropriate and socially sensitive policies and

programs hence proving the shared ethnicity given moral cultures of the accounting society. When accountants become socially aware and responsible, they get motivated since their field of work increases hence reducing the technicality of the scientific approach of accounting (Bush & Maltby, 2004). It is through social accounting that management receives feedback on its policies and also gets the opportunity to incorporate customer feedback in their functions. This improves their functionality generally in their service as well as improving the confidence of shareholders of the firms.

The concept of 'Social Accounting' has received more attention and gained importance due to the high level of industrialization which is the foundation for most successful stories in the society today and equally, many problems. This has, therefore, made it a necessity for the corporate sector to invest enormous amounts in social activities so as to escape the pangs of the adverse effects of industrialization. The outcome of this narrowness is the dissimulation of alternative values and masking of power relationships contribute to the resource allocations (Hines, 1989). Armstrong (1994) in his paper argues that in the application of Foucault's concept of the disciplinary authority, important aspects were overlooked. Accounting systems tend to shift the emphasis away from behavioral procedures onto economic outcomes. This shows just how accounting becomes narrow since a whole social aspect is left out. By providing financial information that is only quantified, accountants do not support decision-making; rather they help in conditioning decision-making such that numbers and currencies are the only things that are termed important. Broadly-conceived social accounting would involve a better redefinition of accounting beyond its financially/numerically-constrained limits (Bush & Maltby, 2004).

Applicable accounting skills have a very valuable role to assist in overcoming visibility problems in its core functions. This includes informing the community clearly about the use of its resources, the burdens and the benefits it has been compelled to take into major development decisions. (Gray 1992). Power (1994) states that accounting "is an embodied practice conducted by experts who can define the problems they face to suit the skills they possess". Some of the relevant skills which accountants could develop include; information systems design and their implementation, understanding the link between information and decisions, verifying the link between evidence and reports, description of values, and presenting information in ways that make it meaningful to users. Social accounting might be operationalized to help make existing pluralistic structures operative (Gray 1992) or even to promote phenomenal democratic change in this professional field. There are at least two non-calculative possibilities for accounting in social areas: the use of accounting metaphors as a conceptual tool; and the use of accounting narratives. Metaphors must not be merely incorporated from conventional accounting; they must

also be adapted in order to make the accounting craft relevant to collective accountability. The use of narratives can create novel visibilities and open areas for debate (Aerts, 1994). A wide array of concepts related to political, cultural, ethical and socioeconomic aspects of life are not only formulated and developed, but also a valid and reliable measurement tools are offered in different branches of social sciences.

Social Sciences, in general, and Sociology, in particular, provide important tools for understanding the everyday life phenomena as well as social and political relationships. Therefore, sociological perspective can be employed as an interpretive tool to explain the outcomes of the actual practice of accounting. There remains a largely untapped potential for sociological concepts that can be utilized in studying the accounting discourse. For example, *budgets* that are imposed on the subordinate staffs instead of negotiating with them, *operations* which are normally rationalized due to an exercise of strategic management accounting, and *wage claims* lost due to the downward revaluation of the fixed assets can be explained under the lenses of sociology (Roslender, 2003). Some even argue that if sociological research is left out from the mainstream of accounting research, it can fetch negative consequences to the discipline of accounting (Baker & Bettner, 1997). This can aid in developing broad skills, like critical thinking, critical analysis and communication skills. Chua (1996) implies that the dominance of the 'calculative' tradition in accounting brings an unnecessarily narrow point of view. Trying not to ignore or undermine the importance of financial accountability, he considered creating opportunities to question the underrated assumptions of accounting and therefore develop an understanding of accounting's social significance beyond financial reporting has become crucial. There exist different theories and approaches which, in their details, constitute a way which is not quite what much traditional. Some of the known sources of these theories include: The phenomenology of Schutz (1962) as exemplified by Berger & Luckman (1966); The Chicago School of Microsociology known as Symbolic Interaction which included such figures as Mead (1934), Thomas (1923), Blumer (1969), Glaser & Strauss (1967); In social psychology, the approach can be associated with Helder's Attribution Theory (1985), George Kelly's Construct Theory (1955) and the ethnographic approach of Harré & Secord (1972). Carnegie and Napier (1996) depicted how to de-contextualize accounting by measuring it in according with the present day format. The connections between the above sources are meager, but they all reflect a way of viewing the relationship between the accountant and the society which lack in the natural scientific approach.

CONCLUSION

This paper outlines the debates and discussions of three complicate issues. First, how the 'sociological concepts' are applicable in accounting science to comprehend the implicative in situations? Second, what sorts of the civil

discourse and the decision-making edifice of the management have to be taken into consideration? Third, what kind of approach needs to be developed to reconstruct the behavioural accounting has been intended? Accountants lack the information systems and reporting that can add credibility to the process as well as organize and present information in a way that makes decision-making processes more transparent, and information more understandable. This leads ultimately to add dialogue and debate as part of the process of community decision-making. Significant improvements can be made at the moment accountants open communications with their colleagues in the field of accounting. That will allow them to generate value and new insights into all the problems discussed in this paper. Therefore, accounting efforts have made an effort to reach out to the society not for the satisfaction of any individual persons, but for the allocation of resources towards a better society. Any form of social assessment or decision-making must cover across all disciplines and not just one area since accounting represents one of man's most concerted efforts to avoid chaos and it would be informative to view it as a social construction and to see how it functions in the everyday world. Such an approach offers a promise of a more pertinent research and more practical theory but it will entail a re-evaluation of behavioural accounting.

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